The Semaphore

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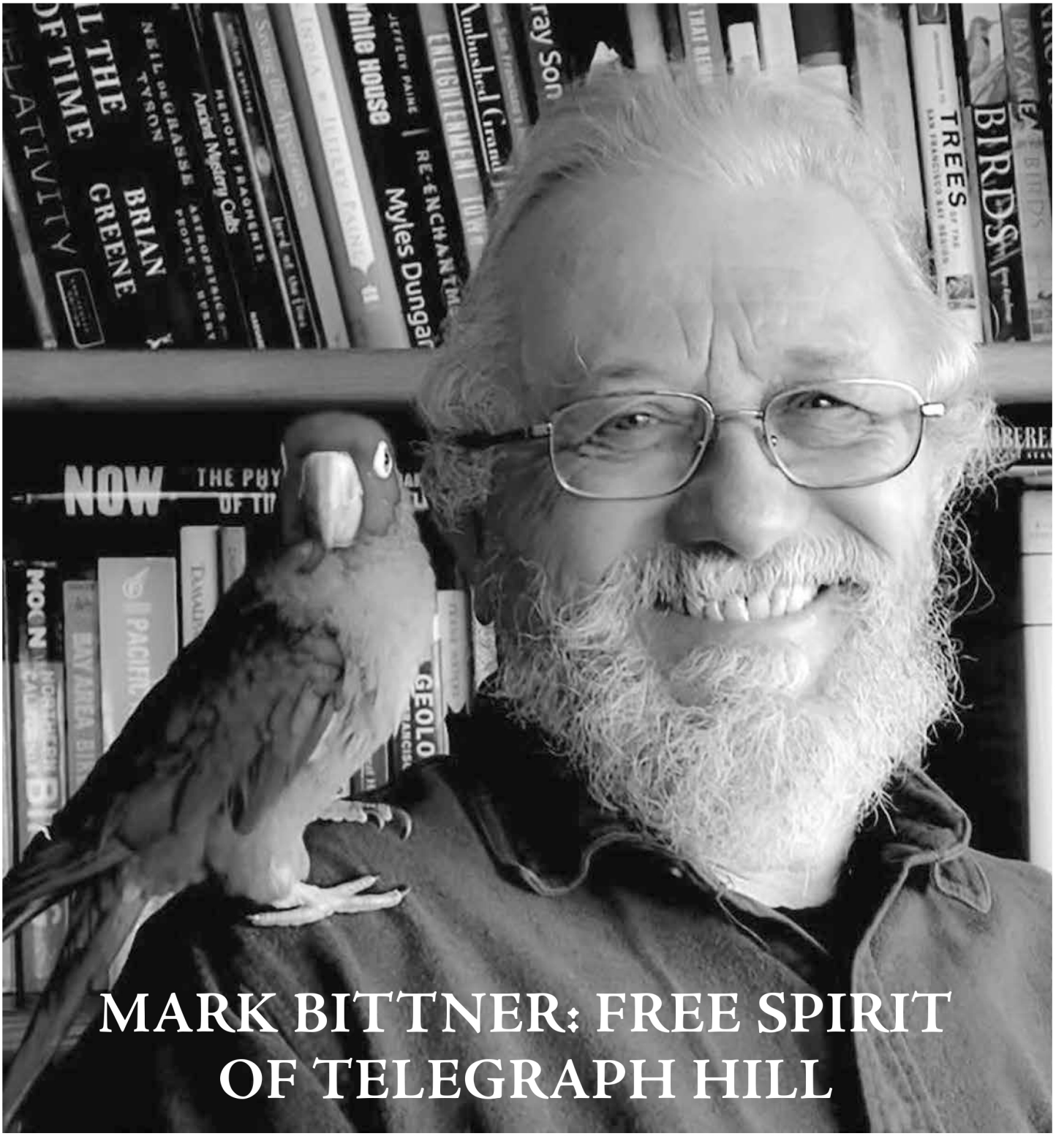

MARK BITTNER: FREE SPIRIT OF TELEGRAPH HILL

A NORTH BEACH BIKE SHOP WITH A MISSION

Gary with friends and supporters.

Courtesy North Beach Cyclery

by Nadya Williams

From safer sidewalks and streets to soaring hills, Gary Dunn of North Beach Cyclery, 1757 Stockton Street, has a vision. Since its opening in Spring 2024, his shop operates exclusively with lightweight, pedal-assist bicycles that are belt-driven (no derailer or chain), very low maintenance, and most important, safer for pedestrians and riders.

Over many years as a tour guide, operating fleets with both throttle-assist and pedal-assist e-bikes, Dunn has observed a clear pattern in incident reports. "I see so many conventional throttle-assist e-bikes accelerating past startled people on sidewalks and roadways," Dunn said in a recent interview. "They are often not experienced riders, and the bikes give them too much power without the necessary experience, leading to less control. Pedal-assist bicycles, however, require the rider to pedal actively before power is delivered, offering a more traditional bike feel and providing assistance only when needed. Safety has always been a core part of my shop's mission."

Dunn's love affair with bicycles started when he was 17 and continued to mountain bike racing, garnering him first place in the 1994 West Coast Mountain Bike Series. Wine industry sales became his day job for 25 years, and competitive racing shifted to casual riding with friends, participating in a few 24-hour team races, and organizing weekly group rides.

However, pandemic and economic shifts destabilized the wine industry, and his love of cycling evolved into a courier business and then the Stockton Street shop.

North Beach Cyclery offers sales and full servicing as well as private guided tours. Beside the iconic routes of the waterfront, Golden Gate Bridge, and the Marin Headlands, tours go far afield to Mount Diablo, Santa Cruz, and beyond. Dunn's family history with the area adds many special touches from conventional tourist trips.

The shop is a family enterprise. Dunn's wife Jennifer, who teaches physical education at Galileo High School, is his supportive advisor. Son Michael, a university student, pinch-hits when he can. "In fact, the storefront where I now have my shop used to be the daycare center where my son went," Dunn says, adding that his grandparents had deep roots in old North Beach, from Fisherman's Wharf to Julius' Castle. Speaking of The City, Dunn is especially appreciative of the extensive help from San Francisco small business departments—from a $10,000 startup grant to legal advice, business plans, and waivers of some permits and fees.

North Beach Cyclery also hosts special events, as when his longtime friend Jonathan Van Coops, a cyclist and cartographer, spoke in November last year to an evening crowd. During a job with the Coastal Commission, Van Coops developed official maps and guidebooks. He is well known for his popular *A Serious Cyclist's Guide to San Francisco and Beyond*. Like Dunn, Van Coops has traversed the West Coast extensively but ventured further afield in both competitive and recreational rides in Europe, culminating in the book *Pedaling Through the Years: Stories of a Cycling Life* . All are on sale at the shop.

North Beach Cyclery
1757 Stockton Street (at Greenwich),
San Francisco, CA 94133
Thursdays through Tuesdays 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
(415) 216-5228
northbeachcyclery.com

Bikes on display.

Courtesy North Beach Cyclery

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A DIGNIFIED LIFE FOR ALL

by Peter Stevens
President@thd.org

I am deeply honored to have your support as the incoming president of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers. I also want to express my gratitude to the long line of presidents who have guided this organization, with special thanks to our outgoing president Nick Ferris.

I also want to recognize Mary Lipian, Teresa Flandrich, Mike Rothmann, and Nanci Gaglio. While I know their commitment to the neighborhood is far from over, their service to THD has already left a lasting mark. During their time in leadership, they strengthened our internal record-keeping, protected tenants from displacement, planted trees, and hosted many community film events. Our organization is only as strong as its membership, and these members exemplify what it means to be stewards of this neighborhood. Their work reflects both the strength of our community and the wide range of ways THD serves Telegraph Hill and North Beach.

For those just getting to know me, my background is in land use. I am trained in the tradition of community development that emerged from the central city redevelopment struggles of the mid-20th century. At that time, lower-income urban neighborhoods were being bulldozed by redevelopment agencies in the name of revitalization and economic growth. Those communities organized and fought back. Their theory was straightforward but powerful. Communities should be empowered to shape their own future, and government should provide the technical assistance and resources needed to support community voices. It is then incumbent on the community to use that power responsibly to create neighborhoods that are culturally and economically vibrant, affordable, and safe, the goal being to provide a dignified life for all residents.

I would argue that this is the model Telegraph Hill Dwellers has embodied for our more than 70+ years of existence.

Today, we are seeing a similar redevelopment dynamic play out across San Francisco. Large well-capitalized interests are targeting thriving neighborhoods like ours. They are attempting to roll back the policies we fought for and won that protect small businesses, affordable rents, and cultural cohesion, all in the name of economic progress. The truth is that these very policies, the ones in which our community has invested, defended, and strengthened over the years are what made this neighborhood successful in the first place. Together, we have helped tip the neighborhood policy balance in favor of mom-and-pop businesses, arts and culture, affordability, and protections against displacement. North Beach is internationally renowned not in spite of these values but because of them.

The exploitation of neighborhoods is nothing new. Redevelopment is just one example. Telegraph Hill Dwellers has met these challenges before, and I believe we are prepared to meet them again. As an organization, we have endured for more than 70 years because of the strength, care, and dedication of our members, and I am confident we will be here for at least 70 more years. It is our love of the neighborhood and our neighbors that binds us.

As President, I see my role as helping to coordinate and support the work our members are already doing, while also creating new opportunities for current and future members to contribute. I believe the best way to help this organization is to back-up its members. THD is strongest when members feel informed, connected, and empowered to act. In my role as President, I will work to make sure members have the tools, communication, and encouragement they need to participate fully in our work, build connections across our shared efforts, and support both longtime members and those just becoming involved. Neighborhoods require constant investment. Nothing you see in North Beach happened by accident. By investing in our members, their ideas, their energy, and their leadership, we invest in the future of this organization and in the future of our neighborhood.

Advertise in The Semaphore.
See page 11.

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ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

ANNUAL MEETING AND DINNER WERE A GREAT SUCCESS

by Sarah Goldsmith, Recording Secretary
sarah.goldsmith@thd.org

Our Annual Meeting and Dinner on April 2 was a joyous occasion to celebrate our community, appreciate the contributions of our transitioning board members, and raise a glass to the success of our 2026-2027 board slate.

The private dining room at Fior d'Italia was filled with fellow Dwellers as we ate a delicious three-course meal against the backdrop of Tuscan scenery. The room represented the diversity of our community with new members breaking bread with long-time supporters; fresh connections were made and existing relationships deepened as we passed plates at five long tables.

Our program began with remarks from outgoing President Nick Ferris, and awards were shared with artist John Mattos (Artistic Legacy Award) and chef and restaurateur Tony Gemignani (Outstanding Service to The Hill Award). Both have planted their roots firmly in North Beach and generously supported our neighborhood through times of both strife and success. It was moving to hear their deep connection to our community and their commitment to our continued thriving. Both are giants in their fields, yet they showed up at the table as neighbors.

Our new President Peter Stevens led a rousing chant to ground us in the power of our collective voice and action. With raucous applause, we voted in our new slate of board members. Separate articles with photos, names, and bios introduce our new additions. You'll notice some existing members have moved on to different roles. And you can find a full set of bios at *THD.org*.

We are confident this iteration of our leadership will steward THD through this next term with the compassion, enthusiasm, grace, and style for which our community is known. We are so excited for what's to come and deeply grateful for the legacy of leadership that has gotten our organization to this place.

Thank you to all who joined and made this event a smashing success. Hope to see even more members at our next meeting!

Photos by David Lipkin

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE THD 2026-2027 BOARD!

Congratulations to the Officers and Directors elected to the THD Board at the Annual Meeting on April 2, 2026.

Officers

President ..... **Peter Stevens**
Vice President..... **Greg Giachino**
Recording Secretary..... **Sarah Goldsmith**
Corresponding Secretary... **Katie Hopkins**
Treasurer..... **Kim Pendleton**
Financial Secretary/Membership
..... **Andy Katz & Judi Powell**
Historian..... **Nancy Shanahan**
Past President ..... **Nick Ferris**
The Semaphore **Editor** ..... **Cap Caplan**

Directors 2025 - 2027 (Unexpired Terms)

Greta Alexander
Ian Kloville
Stan Hayes
Fran Schreiberg

Directors 2026 – 2028

Rosa Arias
Amber Ortiz
David Jones
Jack Shelley

NEW BOARD MEMBER AMBER ORTIZ

I'm a mom, architect-urbanist, real estate project manager, and founder of ONE Cultural Reviews & Gypsysung Gallery, where I strive to plant cultural seeds for relationships and projects to grow organically.

I attend and organize many cultural and social events in San Francisco. I did this during college in Miami, in the first part of my career in NYC, and now as a mom and Telegraph Hill Dweller in San Francisco, having discovered that connection is a solution to the postmodern condition.

I believe in the power of conversation and circulation. And what better way to find out what other people are thinking about, and what better way to connect, than to meet up at gatherings?

NEW BOARD MEMBER JACK SHELLEY

I'm a lifelong San Franciscan and decades-long admirer of North Beach. While I grew up in sleepy Diamond Heights, it was love at first sight walking down Grant Avenue for the first time with my little brother at 14 years old. I now own (rent) a small piece of paradise on Telegraph Hill where I am honored to receive daily updates from neighbors via group chat about the latest parking debacle.

At work I raise funds for a San Francisco hospital. In my free time I love to organize my neighbors for the betterment of the community! I am also an avid reader of books and news, a talker about all things political, and an aspiring swimmer in the cold bay waters.

I am hopeful that with the help of strong local organizations and connected neighborhoods, San Francisco can build a diverse, economically accessible future for all people who seek the privilege of enjoying this special city.

NEW BOARD MEMBER ROSA ARIAS

I moved to the neighborhood at the end of 2024, driven by a desire to be part of a community that truly values inclusivity. One of my favorite things about living here is the simple joy of walking down the street, being known by name, and sharing a friendly hello with neighbors. Having lived all over the city, I eventually found my family within the community in North Beach. I'm eager to bring that same spirit of deep connection and belonging here.

NEW BOARD MEMBER DAVID JONES

I read once that San Francisco is where you go when it all goes wrong. And sure enough, I came here in the spring of 2018 from New York City, exhausted and broke, having just finished a doctoral dissertation that no one bothered to read. I had 27 boxes of books, a Royal Enfield motorcycle, and a firm determination to make this city my home.

Now, eight years later, San Francisco has given me everything: lifelong friends, warm neighbors, and the option to cross the street whenever I need a change of weather. I've fallen in love with the beauty and history of this place, and my heart is now firmly rooted on Telegraph Hill.

These days I live on the east side of the hill with my partner Tricia and our cats Francis and Ruby. On most weekends, you'll find me in the Vallejo Steps garden, planting verbena and sea thrift or pruning roses alongside the kindest neighbors in the world. When the wind is right, you'll find Tricia out on the Bay racing our sailboat *Josephine* and usually winning.

DISTRICT 3 SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

ONE YEAR ON THE JOB

by Supervisor Danny Sauter
Danny.Sauter@sfgov.org

As I reflect on my first year representing District 3, I hope we'll remember it as a year of rebirth in San Francisco. After a difficult period navigating the pandemic and its ruthless wake, we're finally seeing bright spots. Residents are feeling civic pride again, small businesses are seeing some relief, and tourists are returning to our city.

I'm proud of the work we've started but clear-eyed about all the challenges that lay ahead. I also know we have serious cracks in our city's structure: from transit funding to our budget deficit and a persistent wealth inequality. As we tackle these issues, I wanted to reflect on some progress.

Improving Public Safety and Addressing Dangerous Sideshows

Crime citywide is down nearly 30% and nearly 40% within the Central Police District. We've made progress by using new tools and technology, beginning to increase staffing for the first time in years and having a Board, District Attorney, and Police Department that are finally working collaboratively together.

A major concern in the past few years has been the proliferation of sideshows and dangerous dirt bike riding that overtakes areas in District 3 like Lombard Street or the Embarcadero. I've worked closely with the Mayor and Police Department to respond. Increased enforcement has yielded both arrests and vehicle and bike seizures. I also introduced legislation that passed unanimously at the Board to increase penalties and fines for this activity.

Legislation Passes to Support Small Businesses

Small businesses are the heart and soul of our neighborhoods, but we've taken them for granted for too long. Years and years of adding layers of rules and complications have resulted in empty storefronts and too many closing up shop. We're changing this with our small business legislation, District 3 Thrives. Passed this fall by my colleagues, this is a package of common-sense reforms that makes it easier for small businesses to open and grow in District 3. It allows for faster permit approvals, while still maintaining important public comment opportunities. It removes bans you'd be surprised to know exist, such as art galleries being prohibited in Nob Hill or dentist offices not being allowed on Polk Street. It's a big step towards making District 3 a more welcoming, more fair place to open and grow a small business.

Getting Projects Unstuck from Housing to Grocery Stores

Too many projects and plans have languished in our district through the years. This has resulted in empty buildings that weigh down neighborhoods and go underutilized. We identified a number of these projects when I took office, and we arranged regular check-ins and hands-on support to help them get unstuck. This approach has worked, and we're now celebrating major progress across the District.

At the old Lombardi Sports on Polk, after 11 years of rejected plans and delays, FitnessSF has broken ground to open a beautiful new gym on the cusp of Russian Hill and Nob Hill. At 1111 Sutter Street in Lower Nob Hill, we just broke ground on the largest housing project in District 3 in more than 20 years! We passed special legislation to allow this project to break ground this year and to build more than 100 new affordable homes.

Finally, I'm pleased to share that construction has begun to transform the old Safeway on Bay Street into a Grocery Outlet. Within days of the Safeway closure, I organized a petition that caught Grocery Outlet's attention and convinced it of the need for a grocery store in our corner of the city. Since then, we've worked closely with Grocery Outlet and are thrilled that the store will open in the summer.

Building More Homes and Protecting Tenants

The Board of Supervisors recently passed Mayor Lurie's Family Zoning Plan. This reverses San Francisco's massive 1978 downzoning that effectively banned new apartments on the west side of San Francisco and contributed to the housing crisis we are struggling with today. We worked hard to improve this plan. We won amendments to increase the number of family-sized homes and to strengthen support for small businesses.

Voting against the Family Zoning Plan would have brought forward dangerous implications. If we do not have a compliant housing plan with the state by next January, we risk losing more than $100 million in annual housing and transit funding. Not passing the plan would effectively block thousands of new homes. Finally, the "builders remedy" would take effect, allowing high-rise towers across the city with no local control.

Alongside the Family Zoning Plan, I worked to strengthen tenant protections by co-sponsoring Supervisor Chan's Tenants Protection Ordinance. As a lifelong renter raising my family in a North Beach apartment, I am committed to building more homes and strengthening tenant protections. We can, and must, do both.

Looking Ahead

I look forward to an even more productive year ahead. We're pursuing well-earned designations for dozens of historical landmarks in District 3, many in North Beach. We're exploring options to cut down on the dangerous activity of e-bikes and scooters on sidewalks. And we'll keep focused on everyday neighborhood concerns from fixing sidewalks to improving street cleaning and filling empty storefronts.

I welcome your feedback, concerns, or ideas to work together to improve our cherished neighborhoods of North Beach and Telegraph Hill and all of District 3. Please always feel free to reach out: *Danny.Sauter@Sfgov.org.*

See you in the neighborhood.
Danny Sauter

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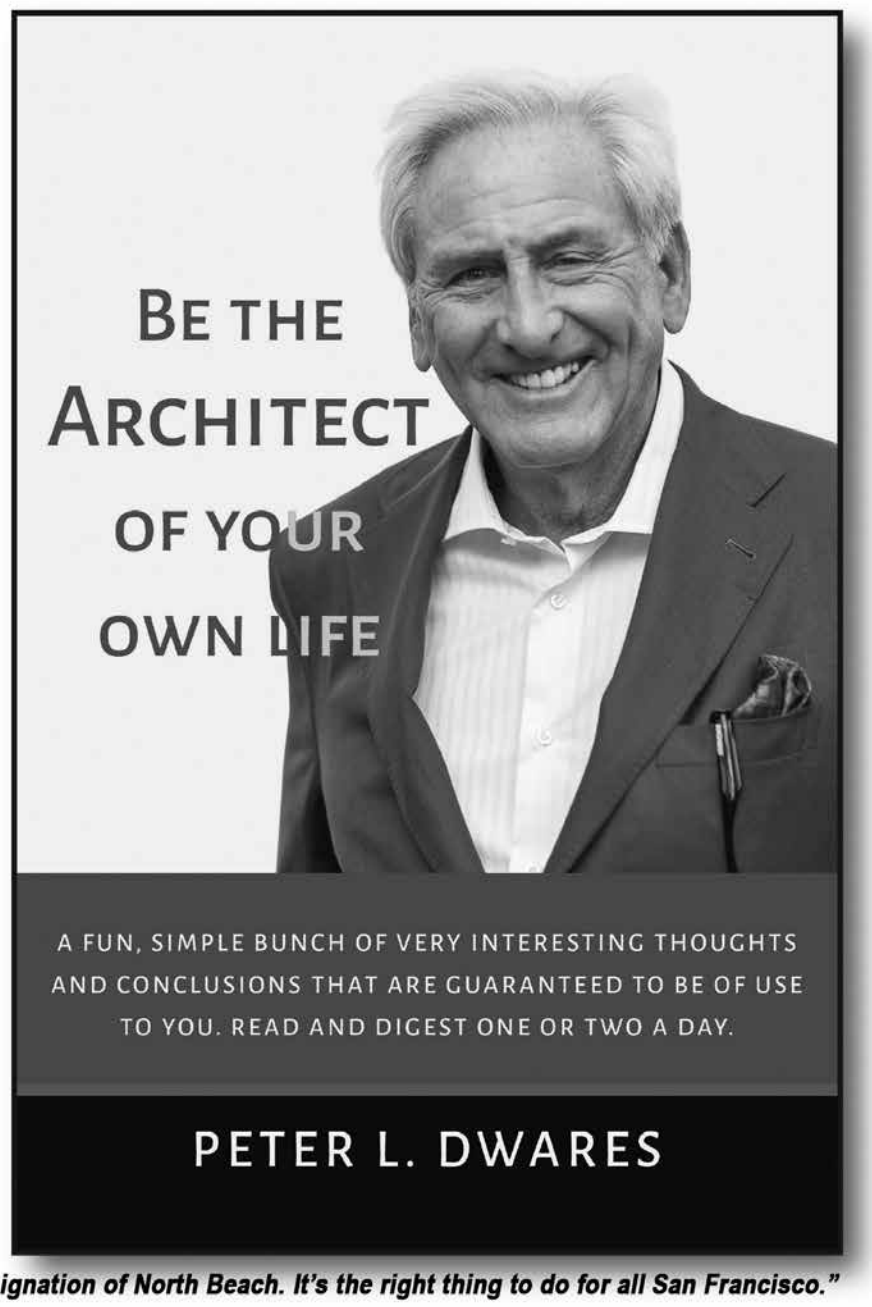


"I support the Historical Designation of North Beach. It's the right thing to do for all San Francisco."

PLANNING & ZONING REPORT

CHARTER AMENDMENTS, LANDMARKING, LAWSUITS, AND SB 79

by Stan Hayes and Nancy Shanahan, Committee Co-Chairs
PZ@thd.org

Yet another fully loaded agenda for our Planning & Zoning Report. Pour yourself a cup of (fully) caffeinated coffee, sit down, and relax (or more likely not) as we bring you up to speed.

Charter Amendments on November Ballot

There are two items that deal with charter amendments on the ballot in November.

- **Streamlining Task Force Recommendations.** Approved by the voters in November 2024, "Proposition E established the Commission Streamlining Task Force to make recommendations to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors about ways to modify, eliminate, or combine the City's appointive boards and commissions."

But the Task Force has been accused of going beyond its mandate. Instead of just culling inactive bodies, its final report in late January recommended stripping away decision-making and oversight authority, moving bodies from the Charter to the Administrative Code where they could be amended more easily by the Board of Supervisors, and merging commissions with similar mandates.

Among its recommendations, for example, are those specific to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), which by a vote of the people has "authority over the historic preservation decisions in the City." In accordance with THD comments, the Task Force recommended keeping the HPC in the Charter instead of eliminating it. However, like it does for a number of other commissions, the Task Force recommended "moving most of the HPC's duties from the Charter to the Planning Code."

We oppose this. We believe that this change would weaken the HPC's authority, making key parts of its responsibilities more vulnerable to politically motivated manipulation. The City Charter can only be changed by the voters (which will be on the November ballot), while the Planning Code can be changed by the Board of Supervisors. The Task Force also recommended changing the Charter's existing requirement that commissioners actually be preservation experts to "desired," as well as changing the Charter's provision allowing removal only "For Cause" to removal by the Mayor "At Will." These changes too would weaken the HPC.

It remains to be seen how many of the Task Force recommendations to cut or weaken the power of dozens of city commissions will end up on the November ballot. At a two-plus-hour informational hearing at the Board of Supervisors on March 17, the Board indicated it will not pursue any controversial Task Force suggestions. Instead, President Mandelman announced that he is planning to draft a Charter amendment with only select "non-controversial" recommendations from the report.

- **Mayor's Proposed Charter Amendments.** Completely separate from the recommendations of the Commission Streamlining Task Force and not considered by the Task Force, Mayor Lurie has proposed Charter amendments of his own, claiming that San Francisco's Charter contains rigid rules that create bureaucracy and inefficiency. While framed as efficiency, the practical effect is centralization of power in the mayor's office and less public oversight. His proposed amendments would do three fundamental things:
- **Reduce oversight of large city contracts:** Arguing that Board approval requirements delay contracts and increase costs, the Mayor's proposal would give his appointed City Administrator the power to change purchasing rules atomically unless the Board or Mayor rejects them.
- **Key Issues:** Board oversight exists precisely because city contracting has historically been a corruption risk. Increasing the contract threshold would mean fewer contracts require Board review and large contracts could proceed without public hearing or debate.
- **Make citizen initiatives harder:** Claiming that the City's initiative system is broken and that too many ballot measures confuse voters and limit government discretion, Mayor Lurie's proposal would raise the number of supervisors needed to place a measure from four to a minimum of six, remove the mayor's ability to place measures on the ballot, and significantly increase the number of signatures required to place an initiative on the ballot from 2% (10,582 valid signatures as of March 2025) to 8% (42,328) of all registered San Francisco voters.
- **Key Issues:** While removing unilateral mayor authority sounds good, the other changes raise barriers to citizen initiatives. San Francisco voters pass or reject measures with clear margins reflecting civic engagement, direct democracy, and voter control over policy. Ballot measures are often the only way voters override City Hall. Examples have historically included: ethics reforms, rent protections, and open government rules.
- **Expand mayoral power over government agencies:** Claiming that the mayor needs power to hire and fire department heads and reorganize government in the name of accountability, this proposal would give the mayor the ability to reshape vastly city government by reorganizing or even consolidating 24 city departments, including the big ones such as police, fire, public works, public health, planning, building inspection, environment, ethics, libraries, recreation, and parks.
- **Key Issues:** Under existing law, any reorganization or consolidation would require a vote of the people. This proposal would allow easier removal of commissioners and greater mayoral control over departments. Independent commissions such as police oversight, planning approvals, and ethics enforcement, exist to prevent political interference. Reducing their independence would make these and other bodies much more political.

Landmarking Just a Few of District 3 Historic Properties. The Planning Department has established a so-called "Family Zoning Landmark Designation Program," stated to preserve "San Francisco's architectural, cultural, and historical resources within the Family Zoning Plan." In what was the second of a series of supervisorial district-specific meetings, the Planning Department held an overflow community forum about potential individual landmark designations in District 3. Of the many hundreds of Category A historic properties in District 3 and in spite of the fully documented North Beach National Register Historic District, just 19 properties, only seven of which are in North Beach, were identified by Planning and District 3 Supervisor Sauter. Of those proposed, Saints Peter and Paul Church and the Bimbo's 365 Club building, as well as several located in Chinatown, have been deleted due to owners' objections. It appears that property owners were not contacted prior to inclusion of their properties on the list of proposed landmarks. As of this writing, Supervisor Sauter introduced legislation to initiate designation of 15 of the proposed District 3 landmarks, including the following six buildings within the proposed North Beach National Register Historic District: Finocchio's, Fugazi Building, Italian Athletic Club, Maybeck Building, Mona's Candle Light, and Vesuvio Cafe Building.

Pending Lawsuits. Lawsuits have been filed challenging the Mayor's Family Zoning Plan and Supervisor Sauter's North Beach Commercial District Rezoning.

Two Lawsuits Challenging the Mayor's Family Zoning Plan from Opposite Sides. In mid- December, the Mayor signed the Family Zoning Plan. This plan represents the most significant rezoning of San Francisco in more than fifty years, allowing a major upsizing of buildings throughout much of the city.

Two lawsuits have now been filed challenging the Plan. From those opposing the Plan's upzoning, a lawsuit challenging the adequacy of the CEQA environmental review of the Mayor's Plan has been filed by Neighborhoods United SF, Small Business Forward, THD member Romalyn Schmaltz, and individual Paul Erikson. From those who believe that the Plan's upzoning does not go far enough, a separate lawsuit challenging the plan's ability to provide sufficient housing to meet state mandates was filed by YIMBY Law.

Lawsuit Challenging Supervisor Sauter's North Beach Commercial District Rezoning. Sponsored by District 3 Supervisor Danny Sauter, a major loosening of planning controls in North Beach, Polk Street, Pacific Avenue, Nob Hill, and Jackson Square has rolled back long-standing neighborhood protections. In response, a lawsuit challenging the elimination of the North Beach and Jackson Square Special Use Districts has been filed by the North Beach Business Association, THD, Small Business Forward, Jackson Square Historic District Association, and individual Thaddeus Carhart.

Senate Bill 79 implementation in San Francisco. Sponsored by State Senator Scott Wiener, California Senate Bill 79 (SB 79), the Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act, was passed by the state legislature in 2025 and takes effect on July 1, 2026. SB 79 requires that local governments permit residential development on sites within one-half mile of defined transit- oriented development stops, up to specified density limits, floor area ratios, and height limits. To implement the legislation in San Francisco, the Mayor introduced an "Alternative Plan" that satisfies the transit-oriented development requirements of SB 79. The proposed Alternative Plan will increase the density allowed on certain parcels, including several on Telegraph Hill and the Waterfront. The Planning Commission considered and recommended adoption of the Alternative Plan at its meeting on March 19 and the Board of Supervisors will consider its adoption within 30 days.

To join, or to get information from, the THD Planning & Zoning Committee, just send an email to *PZ@thd.org*. We look forward to hearing from you.

THE ACCIDENTAL

RIP MARK BITTNER — MUSICIAN, NOMAD ACTIVIST, NATURALIST, FRIEND, AN

by Romalyn Schmaltz

North Beach's skies literally rang out with cherry-headed conure cries this early March as we learned about the untimely passing of one of our dearest, most influential THD members, writer and musician Mark Bittner, who passed away from a heart attack in his sleep on the night of February 28, 2026 at the age of 74 while housesitting in Arcata, CA.

Mark had embarked on what his creative partner and wife of almost 20 years, filmmaker Judy Irving, called his "nomad adventurer period." Having been diagnosed with congestive heart failure last year, he'd become determined to "live life before you die" by bouncing among the "green velvet hills of Northern California"—as we both often called them—in San Francisco-adjacent hamlets and suburbs, entreating his thousands of blog and Facebook readers to hitch their screens to his wagon and together cheat death with a little living.

"For decades, I've been a pedestrian confined to San Francisco. I often get the yearning to see other places, particularly in Northern and Central California. Since my hospital stay, the yearning has become more acute. So, I finally pulled the trigger on something that's been on my wish list for some time: I bought a camper van. A 2005 Honda Odyssey. It's got a bed, a faucet and sink, and a solar panel on the roof which powers a refrigerator and recharges phones. I'm going to add a few other small gadgets and start taking it on the road for excursions into the unknown. I want to meet new people and see new places. I've always believed that one should live before one dies, and I intend to do so."

From the road, he regaled readers with arid observations about suburban sprawl, his philosophy overriding the banality of the 'burbs. But when he got the call to housesit in Humboldt County, he bade his followers to traipse vicariously some 300 miles up the coast with him to something much more his speed. Unfortunately, he chose to do so on Highway 1 overnight in a rainstorm. In one of his last posts, he laments, "The reason I got sick was because […] I didn't want to abandon the scenic-route philosophy for this. So I killed myself driving up 1 all the way into the night. I should've taken 101."

While in this instance Mark's "scenic-route philosophy" undermined his future, it was his *modus operandi* over a long life filled with a refusal of the paths most taken.

He had first driven down to San Francisco in the late 1960s from his childhood home and suburb of Portland, OR—Vancouver, WA—where he was born on November 29, 1951. Mark then traveled extensively in Europe, including a long stay in Hydra, Greece, where he lived among expats and local artists and musicians in actual caves on seaside bluffs, cavorting with the likes of Leonard Cohen's muse Marianne Ihlen and seeking redemption from middle-class morality in the enlightenment of poverty and freedom from conventional expectations.

When his beloved two-years-younger sister Beth graduated high school, he returned to Vancouver to make a nomad out of her, too.

"It was 1973, and he was going to move to San Francisco and of course I'd always wanted to go there. He'd already been there, and when we pulled up and saw the City as we were driving into it—you know that view—it's just like opening up a world." Besides San Francisco, "he introduced me to so many things I would never have known about otherwise, like Bob Dylan and Lenny Bruce."

"The whole thing was so exciting and new. He always called me his 'little sister' and watched out for me. We did do quite a lot of music in that time, singing in North Beach and Chinatown streets and bars. I was down there for like four-and-a-half years. It was a very special time, and the world was a much more wonderful place then."

While Beth returned to Washington to "do the family thing," Mark remained in San Francisco, hoping to support himself with busking and odd jobs. He eventually found himself in a long pattern of homelessness that spanned the '80s and '90s, sometimes housesitting for various North Beach residents but often also sleeping outdoors in makeshift camps on Telegraph Hill's eastern slope under our local citadel and his "favorite use of concrete ever," Coit Tower. These decades are now chronicled in his completed memoir and studio recording Street Song to be published posthumously.

It was in the late 1990s that Mark officially met the companions that would change everything: the wild parrot flock nesting along Telegraph Hill and the woman who introduced them to the world, Judy Irving. In 1998, Judy followed a tip that an eccentric hermit was feeding the cherry-headed conures in the Greenwich Steps gardens, and as a filmmaker especially interested in wild birds, she trucked her camera down the 100-plus stairs to where Mark was living as a caretaker.

Their project's first phase—filming and getting familiar with one another—lasted more than four year, around which time Judy put together a Tenancy In Common (TIC) compound of homeowners and moved onto the slope herself. Mark and Judy had fallen in love during the creative process, and Mark found a permanent home for the first time in decades. As she completed the film *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*, Mark wrote the eponymous novel that went on to enjoy much sunshine on the New York Times' bestseller list. Theirs was a story with the happiest of endings: They were married by Supervisor Aaron Peskin in a surprise ceremony disguised as Judy's 60th birthday party at the South End Rowing Club in June, 2006.

Early days of Mark and Judy as a young couple at South End Rowin

And just like that, Mark became Bittner the Bird Man. As his neighbor of 16 years who rented from one of the owners in the TIC—and who enjoyed a porch right on the path that cuts through the Valetta Heslet Gardens on the Greenwich Steps next to the house where the feedings began—I was asked by tourists *every single day I lived there* about the parrots and their

Mark in Bruce Kaphan's studio recording *Street Song*'s album-length musical component. FROM HIS FACEBOOK PAGE

Mark feeding the parrots in the earlier days of filming—before the symbolic haircut. FROM HIS FACEBOOK PAGE

Mark in Hydra, Greece, 1969. FROM HIS FACEBOOK PAGE

ORNITHOLOGIST:

ND AUTHOR OF "THE WILD PARROTS OF TELEGRAPH HILL" PASSES AWAY AT 74

ng Club, 2003. Courtesy Judy Irving

human avatar, Mark. He didn't necessarily enjoy this celebrity, however. By the time I moved in—also in June of 2006—

Mark had long stopped feeding the flock and even successfully lobbied the SF Board of Supervisors for an ordinance in 2007 forbidding their feeding to protect their wild instincts from urban predators.

"It's funny, because I always had Mark down as a parrot guy before I knew him, and then when we got acquainted, I realized Judy's actually the bird lady and Mark's a musician," reflected Sarah Lemarié, CEO of Mickaboo Bird Rescue, a nonprofit agency dedicated to protecting, healing, and re-homing wild and domesticated birds.

Lemarié helped Mark and Judy navigate many emergency situations with injured members of the flock over many years, becoming their close friends in the process. "I think his sense of humor and musicianship were the two things I had an appreciation for the more I got to know him. I wish I'd have talked to him more about *Street Song*. I've come back to music recently for my own well-being, and I believe he was first and foremost a musician. He turned to music to make sense of the world in his early years, and it clearly was his center all through his life."

"He was particularly jovial at the big screening of the remaster at the Roxie the first night, and he was really tickled at what Judy had done. Judy was very sneaky and she'd gotten Supervisor Aaron Peskin's aide to create an official proclamation declaring it Sarah Lemarié Day—January 12, 2024. Mark spent the rest of the day mocking me because I didn't even know it was my day."

The 17-year Supervisor was himself a close friend and neighbor during all Mark's years in the compound. "He certainly wasn't long for social conventions like small talk. His politics were fantastic—he knew the lay of the land and could smell a 'moderate' BS artist from a mile away as the parrot flies. He was a quintessential North Beach character who met the world on his own wonderful terms and knew the score without pretense or animus. A pure, itinerant soul," remembered Aaron fondly.

Another longtime North Beach neighbor and THD member, artist, and award-winning tour guide Blandina Farley, recalled him as a contemporary fellow eccentric who also never left after having landed on Planet North Beach.

"Mark and I just so happened to arrive in San Francisco around the same time in the early 1970s, and it was no mistake that we wandered right into North Beach. It was an exciting, inspiring, truly magical pocket in time full of music, painters, poets, strippers, and a whole array of colorful characters—and fortunately a few affordable years before the tech rushes of the later decades."

"In those days, I knew Mark enough to say 'hi' because we were kind-of neighbors—I lived ln the Old Roma Macaroni Factory at the north base of Telegraph Hill, and Mark was staying on the east side of Telegraph Hill surrounded by the beautiful garden steps where he began his now legendary relationship with the parrots. I always knew he was around because he played music on the street, and he used to stop into the Postermat where I worked on Grant. Mark was and still is the perfect independent North Beach free-spirited artist person."

"His unexpected and sad passing brought back a rush of memories of that special time in North Beach—so authentic, magical, creative, and alive with passion, especially for art. Of course, it still is, but we were lucky to have lived in that fantastical moment. Mark was and is the real deal, a true North Beach legend. I think of him every time I hear the unmistakable chatter of parrots overhead. And I swear they are circling above North Beach and Telegraph Hill more than ever. Like they are looking for Mark and miss him, just like we do."

His open mind and heart were remembered by another of our neighbors and THD members, writer Richelle Slota. "Mark and Judy surprised and delighted me by coming to my Zero Birthday Party—a party I threw for myself when I transitioned as a transgender woman. I didn't expect them to come. A Bittner sighting was always rare, but I was zero years old in my new gender and my cake had a big zero candle on it, and darned if they didn't show up. They were as loving and giving and delightful as could be. Their acceptance meant a lot to me."

As I lived next door to the man for 16 years, I can confirm all testimonials to his artistic, uncompromising, often hilarious character. Mark and I always tried to share tables at events like THD annual dinners and community functions, and when I became THD's Art and Culture Committee chair in 2015, one of my first events was *Walk Talks*, a writers' symposium on the peripatetic spirit featuring Gary Kamiya's *Cool Grey City of Love* and Mark's then-work-in-progress, *Street Song*. I can't count how many political signs we hoisted in solidarity, from enlisting the parrots in campaigns for Aaron for Supervisor and Mayor, to artfully challenging the rapacious upzoning of North Beach last year by our new real estate-favoring Supervisor and Mayor, to laughing derisively together at indifferent jocks playing pickleball in a human aquarium at the Embarcadero during last October's No Kings march. We also had some rowdy musical jams in the gardens, and I even accompanied him to Bruce Kaphan's South Bay recording studio for one of his Street Songs sessions.

Mark's antipathy for the Blue Angels was well-documented. from his Facebook page

Starting in 2013, Mark bonded in a unique way with James Cha, my partner who lived with me for my last eight years on the Greenwich Steps compound, over politics and humor, too, but also through Buddhist philosophy. He consoled me greatly when James himself passed away suddenly last November from a stroke, reminding me that James saw a simple key to unlocking the mysteries of life and death: they are but two sides of the same coin.

"Mark was not afraid of death," Judy reminds us all. "He was quite matter of fact about it, actually. He thought of it as part of life. He did not like testimonials or memorials. He believed in the 'Zen Waterfall' metaphor as described in *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill:*

'There's a story that Suzuki Roshi told. He was the Zen master at the Zen Center here in San Francisco. He went to Yosemite. And he sees this big waterfall coming over this cliff. And it's one river at the top of the cliff, but as it falls the river breaks up into all these individual droplets. And then it hits the bottom of the cliff and it's one river again. We're all one river 'til we hit this cliff. That distance between the top of the cliff and the bottom of the cliff is our life. And all the individual little droplets think they really are individual little droplets until they hit the bottom, and then they're gone. But, you know, that droplet doesn't lose anything. It gains. It gains the rest of the river.'"

Mark Christopher Bittner will "gain the rest of the river" this coming summer when his ashes are scattered in Trapper Creek, in an old-growth forest in southern Washington where his family had a cabin. He'll be soon remembered in a bronze plaque to be designed and forged by legacy metalsmith Danny Macchiarini at Macchiarini Creative Design, sponsored generously by Tom Miller from the Green Cities Fund, and to be placed on a retaining wall along the Greenwich Steps at the site where the feedings all began in the '90s.

In lieu of a memorial, The Roxie movie theater hosted a sold-out screening of *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, April 12 featuring a Q&A with Aaron Peskin, Judy Irving, Mark's sister Beth Lyons, and Sarah Lemarié, moderated by Amanda Bartlett from SFGate.

Mark, writer Gary Kamiya, and author Romalyn Schmaltz at the Walk Talks reading at Canessa Gallery, 2015. © James Cha

PARKS & TREES REPORT

ARBOR DAY BRINGS OUT THE CROWDS TO PLANT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

by Michael Rothmann, Committee Chair
michael.rothmann@thd.org

Editor's Note: Recognition is due to Michael Rothmann, Chair of the Parks & Trees Committee, whose determination and tireless advocacy have paid off in a meaningful way. Thanks in large part to his efforts, the Committee has been awarded a $5,000 Neighborhood Beautification Grant from San Francisco Beautiful. The grant will help fund the restoration of Jack Early Park, preserving and revitalizing a beloved neighborhood landmark.

—Cap Caplan, Editor, *The Semaphore*

On Saturday March 14, youth groups, volunteers, city employees, and politicians assembled at Francisco Middle School for an Arbor Day Fair sponsored by the Department of Public Works. There were lots of fun activities at the non-profit booths with plants and seeds for the attendees to take home. The show-stopping attraction at the Fair, as always, is the bucket ride which hoists willing participants 50 feet in the air in a cherry picker. After plenty of congratulations and commendations for the city departments and officials who maintain our streets, volunteers were dispatched throughout District 3 to plant the trees under the supervision of the DPW crews. DPW has advertised the number planted as an even 100. Overall, it was a great turnout and good to see the City continuing to take initiative to green our streets, working towards meeting its Street Tree SF and Climate Action Plan goals.

Jack Early Park Light Fixture. © Michael Rothmann

City Hall Street Tree Battle Continues

The Mayor's proposed initiative to streamline the street tree removal process has advanced out of the Planning Committee and is headed for the Transportation and Land Use Committee. The proposal which seeks to amend the Public Works code, makes our urban canopy more vulnerable to new development and effectively disenfranchises the public from objecting. The details of the proposal include removing the Board of Appeals review for trees deemed hazardous by the City and allow new construction projects to choose an in lieu fee based on 2023 costs instead of holding them responsible for planting street trees or even leaving space for future plantings. This change can potentially impact large swaths of the city. Over the past five years, there have been numerous instances when the City deemed entire blocks "hazardous," for example 24th Street and more recently in Hayes Valley. Without a proper appeals process, these blocks would have already been denuded. Instead, because of the public appeals process, many of these trees were saved. And in Mission Verde on 24th Street, the public response fostered community stewardship.

In the name of streamlining development, Mayor Lurie and Supervisor Wong are attempting to silence public dissent and to make it easier for developers to skirt their responsibility to contribute to the welfare of our shared environment. Now is the time to voice your disapproval and contact your supervisor!

Telegraph Hill Dwellers Receive $5,000 for Jack Early Park

The Telegraph Hill Dwellers Parks & Trees Committee has been awarded a $5,000 Neighborhood Beautification Grant by the San Francisco Beautiful organization. The grant will support the restoration of Jack Early Park by funding materials. But we still need volunteers! Work includes restoring wooden lighting fixtures, the irrigation system, removing ivy for new plantings, and sprucing up the viewing platform. If you're interested in getting involved with this project, please reach out to *mike@thd.org*.

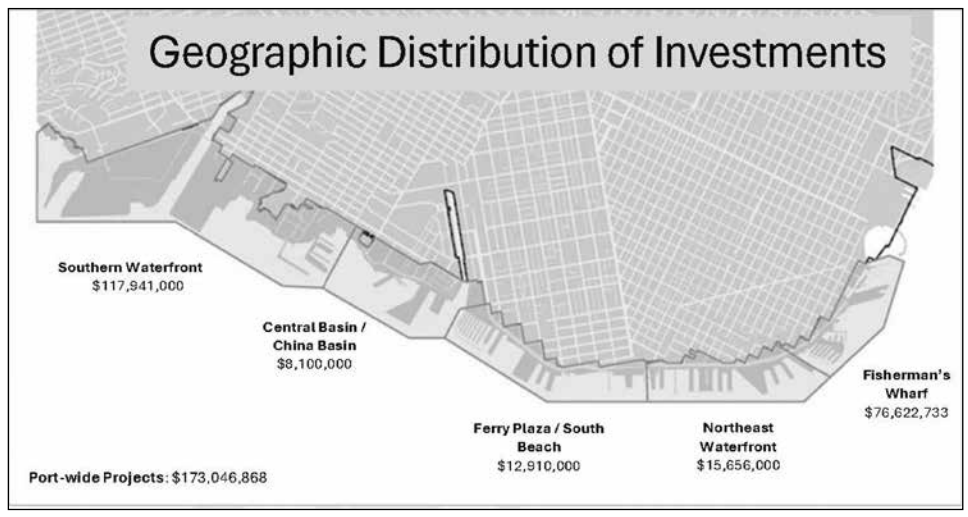
WATERFRONT REPORT

A NEW CULTURAL ZONE FOR THE NORTHEAST WATERFRONT

by Greg Chiampou, Committee Chair
greg.chiampou@waterfront.org

A once-nameless stretch of the Northeast Embarcadero—long just a pass-through for Cruise Terminal and Alcatraz visitors—is poised to become a new cultural destination. The latest catalyst is a new partnership between the Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST) and the Port of San Francisco to transform Pier 29 into the city's largest open studio and exhibition space.

The northeast waterfront, spanning Piers 9 through 33 between the Wharf and Ferry Building areas, has always evolved with the city. It began as a base for the early fishing fleets before they migrated to the Wharf, later became a major shipping and cargo hub, and then as the country's second-largest Port of Embarkation during World War II. When container shipping rose in the 1960s, port activity slowed—but a new momentum is building again.



Courtesy San Francisco Port and the SFMTA

Pier 29, exterior. © Dennis Hearne

Pier 29, interior. © Dennis Hearne

CAST now holds a two-year lease with the Port at Pier 29, with an option to extend and is also partnering with San Francisco Arts Commissioner JD Beltran and the Art + Water residency program to bring exhibitions, performances, workshops, and artist residencies to the pier. The cavernous interior space is often compared to a European railroad station (see photo) and can fit up to 2,500 people. CAST and the Port are currently assessing needed construction upgrades.

The Arts + Water artists' residency program will begin once construction is complete. Application information for artists interested in residencies is available at *artpluswater.org*. CAST's President Ken Ikeda and Director of National Programs Louise Martorano see Pier 29 as part of the city's ecosystem, a place where local artists and organizations can collaborate, connect and create. They also credit the Port's commitment to arts as key to contributing to the waterfront's vibrancy and making Pier 29 a lively, accessible cultural anchor for the neighborhood.

They're not alone. The Exploratorium's interactive science museum at Pier 15 continues to draw strong crowds, and Autodesk's Technology Center at Pier 9 supports innovation in manufacturing, robotics and design and is open to inventors. Foot traffic from the Cruise Terminal and Alcatraz Landing keeps the northeastern area pulsing, while new dining options—like the "wine-forward" bistro Moonchild (to open at the former Fog City location) alongside longtime locals' favorite Pier 23 Café—add to the area's energy.

With all these pieces coming together, the northeastern waterfront may finally be ready for an actual destination name that reflects its creative and cultural revival. What would you name it?

Other Waterfront News:

- The Port released its 2026-2031 capital investment plan (see image), with its largest funding expected for the Southern waterfront and Wharf areas.
- Construction of Alioto's Plaza at Pier 45 is expected to be completed in the 4Q26.
- Redevelopment plans for Piers 30-32 were postponed due to funding challenges and high office vacancy rates. The developers are exploring design changes for Pier 32, while housing plans for the adjacent Seawall Lot 30 continue.
- The U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers' draft Flood Study for San Francisco's bay waterfront is expected by the end of 2026, after which it will be submitted to Congress for funding. Congress can and might modify the plan's recommendations.

TRANSPORTATION REPORT

TRANSIT ACCOUNTABILITY: BEYOND MONEY

Howard Wong, AIA, Committee Chair
howard.wong@thd.org

Billions & Billions of Money: Not All that Glitters is Gold

Muni's structural budget deficits will persist for years or decades to come, with increasing labor, operating, infrastructure, and deferred maintenance costs. Over the last decade, despite expenditures of billions of dollars, San Francisco's transit modal share of all trips has declined, even before the pandemic, an extremely poor return on the dollar.

The $2 billion Central Subway has been a major contributor to perpetual budget deficits, elimination of bus lines, and decreased service. Its local matching funds alone could have transformed the entire Muni system by improving maintenance, next-generation mobility, service, and technology. Its $400 million cost overrun would have covered several years of deficits. Its water leak repairs cost $7 million and counting. And high annual operating costs (for fewer riders) continue to cut citywide service year after year.

Voters want assurances that any new taxes will be spent on intended purposes, to save and restore transit service, not diverting millions or billions of funds to the costly low-ridership Central Subway. The alphabet-soup of transit funders—FTA, CTC, CalSTA, MTC, SFCTA, SFMTA—need to safeguard public funds and dramatically increase transit modal share.

Trail of Transit Boondoggles: Mega Money for Little Gain

It is bewildering as to why politicians would push for a costly divisive subway just ahead of a transit tax on the November ballot. Muni faces structural budget deficits for decades to come. Even Muni is downplaying the politicians' push: "In the near term, given our financial situation and the limited funding resources currently available to us, prioritizing cost-effective improvements to existing services and projects remains our top priority."

Push for a low-ridership, high operating cost subway seems to have objectives other than that of transit. Tax measures help ride-share companies supplant transit and undermine confidence in Muni priorities. A subway system that reinforces the northern waterfront upzoning plan escalates land values and promotes lucrative development.

Quicker and cheaper transit solutions exist. Especially after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the City could have started a free shuttle bus loop from Moscone and Union Square to Chinatown, North Beach, and Fisherman's Wharf.

Like great metropolitan transit authorities around the world, the Bay Area's integration of regional transit needs to be accelerated. By coordinating the Bay Area's 27 transit agencies and 140 transit-related providers, shared cost-savings and a regional network would benefit everyone.

Results-Driven Expenditures: Need Bang for the Buck

Continuing to spend millions or billions of transit dollars without significant increases in transit modal share and ridership numbers is the height of insanity. Let us be pragmatically bolder by jumping to the next generation of public transit.

Revolutionary transit technology is already here: smart bus rapid transit, automated trackless trains (guided by painted sensors on roads), 24/7 micro-buses, large-capacity electric ferry boats, flying taxis, smart e-bikes and scooters (for cargo, delivery, and last-mile connectivity), and digital management of streets, traffic, and transit. Perpetual structural budget deficits, changing economics of work-from-home, decentralized and polycentric districts, and AI and technology require a futuristic mindset. Instead of waiting 15-30 years for costly subways, San Francisco can more quickly increase transit modal share and ridership numbers via efficient conventional and new-age transit projects.

Vision Zero Case Study: Funding for Global Best Practices

After each traffic or pedestrian death, "Thoughts and prayers" are tiring performative diversions from comprehensive action plans based on global best practices. Hoboken (NJ) has had no traffic deaths for eight consecutive years as a result of crosswalk and street design, reduced speed limits, and low-cost paint on posts for safety upgrades. Helsinki (Finland) has had zero pedestrian, cyclist, or passenger fatalities for a year with a Vision-Zero policy, safe street design, lower road speeds, automated cameras, and pedestrian-oriented urban design.

Sweden has one of the world's lowest rates of drunk driving, due to strict laws (a 0.02% blood alcohol limit), wide random testing, harsh penalties, ignition interlocks, and high social stigma. China's new generation of Electric Vehicles has AI safety technology that scans roads with lasers, sees obstacles in the dark, avoids obstacles and pedestrians, automatically brakes for emergencies, and refuses to let you crash.

GOOD PROJECTS CRITERIA: WEEDING OUT THE BAD AND THE POLITICS

1. Does the project significantly increase transit modal share and ridership numbers?
2. Are the benefits worth the cost?
3. Are there cheaper and quicker projects and technology that meet or exceed objectives?
4. Is the project really needed and in the public good or politically-driven?
5. Is there an independent analysis of costs and viable alternatives?
6. If the project fails to meet objectives, are there formal consequences or penalties?

California is making strides with AB 413 ("Daylighting Law"), which prohibits parking within 20 feet of crosswalks to improve visibility, a key to Hoboken's success. Further statewide laws and enforcement tools should be considered: lower speed limits, stronger DUI regulations, no right turn on red, bans on retractable car door handles, and more.

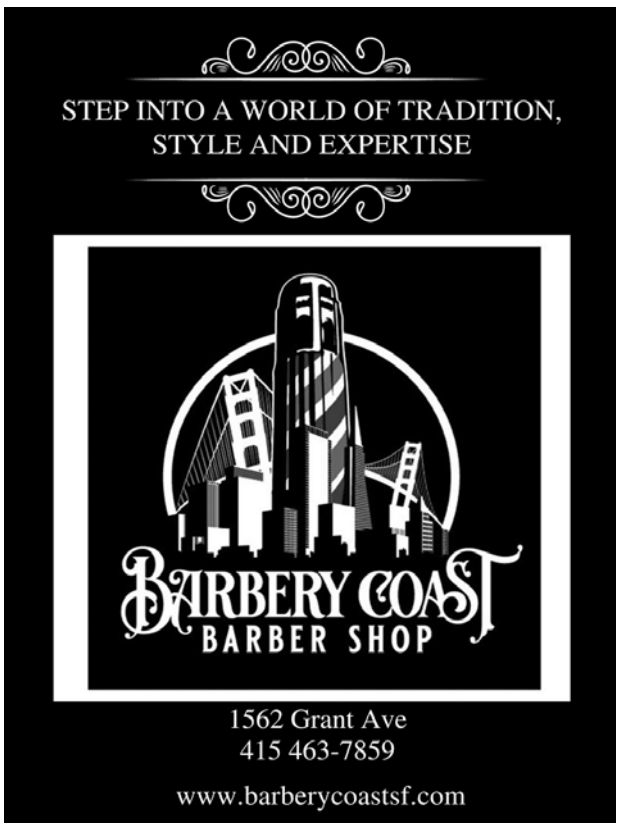
Local Equitable Distribution of Money and Jobs

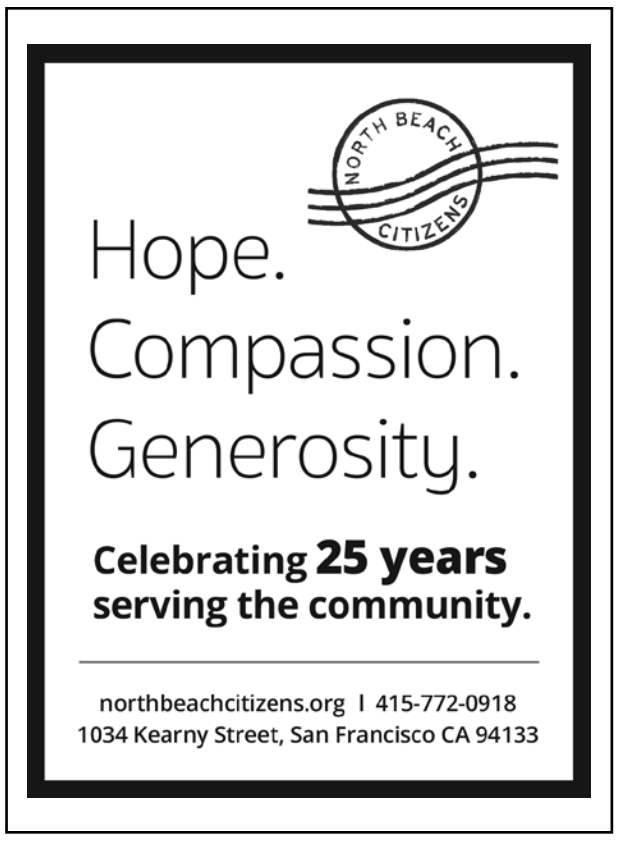
Prioritize transit funding to local businesses, contractors, unions, vendors, and workers via quicker projects distributed to SF districts and neighborhoods, which quickly boosts community businesses, jobs, transit ridership, street beautification, multi-modal design, and safety. With professional analysis of cost-benefits and time, selective smart projects can more quickly transform the citywide Muni system. Eschewing transit politics, Muni can weed out costly inefficient mega-projects that divert massive dollars to international companies, out-of-state contractors and vendors, consultants, lobbyists, and special interests.

HOWARD'S (OCCAM'S) TRANSIT RAZOR:

The simplest solution is preferable, building projects that get the most transit benefits, for the most people, at the lowest cost, in the shortest timeframe, and with the highest design quality, and which significantly increase transit modal share.

FRISC = Fast, **F**requent, **R**eliable, **I**nexpensive, **S**afe, **C**lean, and **"C**ool"





BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY – MARCH 2026

by Mary Lipian, Recording Secretary
mary.lipian@thd.org

January 2026

John Knox, Ben Frazier, and Luiz Barata of San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) presented the proposed Embarcadero Connectivity Plan. It is intended to address potential transportation impacts from the Port's future work along the Embarcadero. The SFMTA group stressed that the Embarcadero is at risk for earthquakes and sea level rise that cannot be ignored. They shared a draft Waterfront Flood Study Plan that is intended to floodproof piers and select buildings, as well as raise and rebuild wharves and the Ferry Plaza. Port buildings will be moved or elevated. The San Francisco Waterfront Flood Study will be completed in 2026 and will include improvements to the Embarcadero corridor and improved connections from the waterfront. The proposed Embarcadero Connectivity Plan is currently in the public outreach phase.

North Beach Noir film series is continuing. On Wednesday, January 21, *Sudden Fear* will be showing at Live Worms. North Beach Noir will take place every third Wednesday of the month in North Beach from January through May and is free of charge.

The Department of Public Works has authority to remove San Francisco trees. Mayor Daniel Lurie has introduced new legislation designed to streamline tree removal, making it easier for developers to remove trees. THD will closely monitor this proposed legislation.

The North Beach Historic District nomination continues to be delayed and is still not on the calendar of the Historical Resources Commission. There have been no responses to the public records requests.

Supervisor Danny Sauter and the Planning Department have scheduled Community Forums on potential landmark designations in District 3 on January 28 at the North Beach Library and a virtual forum on February 4. While 19 buildings in District 3 are being proposed for listing, only seven are located within the proposed North Beach Historic District. This is not a substitute for designating North Beach as a National Register Historic District, which offers both cultural and economic benefits.

In mid-December, Mayor Lurie signed the Family Zoning Plan. The Plan was passed by the Board of Supervisors by a 6-4 vote. Subsequently a lawsuit challenging the Plan was filed by a broad coalition of neighborhood groups.

On October 28, the Board of Supervisors passed Supervisor Sauter's North Beach "consolidation legislation" by a vote of 8-2. In response, a broad coalition of North Beach businesses, neighborhood organizations, and residents filed a lawsuit challenging the City's sweeping rollback of carefully calibrated zoning rules designed to preserve and protect historic and cultural resources in North Beach and Jackson Square.

Safeway is planning State Density Bonus projects at four current grocery sites. Preliminary plans have been filed to replace the Marina Safeway with a massive 25-story, 297-foot apartment complex.

Preliminary permits have been filed for the demolition of a vacant theater in the West Portal neighborhood, replaced by a nine-story, 119-foot building with 64 rental apartments.

Mayor Lurie is proposing a Transit Parcel Tax Measure potentially generating $85 million annually. A parcel tax measure requires two-thirds voter approval. San Francisco residents can expect to see MUNI fare increases. A signature-gathering campaign aims to place the Regional Tax Measure on the ballot as an Initiative that only requires a 50% +1 to pass; it would increase sales tax in five counties (1% in San Francisco).

February 2026

The THD Nominating Committee is comprised of five members. Two of the five members are appointed by the President and three of the Nominating Committee members are elected by the Board. President Nick Ferris appointed Greg Giachino and Peter Stevens. The Board elected Sarah Goldsmith, Stan Hayes, and Kim Pendleton

THD is organizing the Annual Membership Meeting, which will take place on April 2 at Fior d'Italia at 5:30 p.m. The fee for dinner will be $65.00 per person. THD members can attend the Annual Meeting at 7:30 p.m. only at no charge.

The Board reported the Planning Department has established a Family Zoning Landmark Designation Program intended to preserve "San Francisco's architectural, cultural, and historical resources within the Family Zoning Plan." The department held a community forum about potential individual landmark designations in District 3 on January 28 at the North Beach Library, attended by an overflowing crowd, estimated at more than 75 persons with a second virtual forum on February 4. Of the many hundreds of historic properties in District 3, only 19 properties were listed and only by their property addresses. It appears that none of the property owners were contacted prior to the inclusion of their properties.

A lawsuit challenging the adequacy of the CEQA review of the Mayor's Family Zoning Plan has been filed by Neighborhoods United SF, Small Business Forward, and two individuals.

A separate lawsuit challenging the Plan's ability to provide sufficient housing to meet state mandates is expected to be filed by YIMBY Law in February.

THD sent a letter of support for Vesuvio's application for an outside entertainment permit for proposed events in Jack Kerouac Alley.

Approved by the voters in 2024, "Proposition E established the Commission Streamlining Task Force to make recommendations to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors about ways to modify, eliminate or combine the City's appointive boards and commissions." The Task Force recommends keeping the Historic Preservation Commission, issuing its final report on January 28. The Task Force proposes moving most of the Historic Preservation Commission duties to the Planning Code.

The Board of Supervisors voted to place on the June ballot a proposed charter amendment that would restrict lawmakers to serving two terms for life. Former San Francisco Mayors Willie Brown and Art Agnos and former Governor Jerry Brown oppose the amendment.

Under the City's 4/6-plex legislation, while non-corner lots can build up to six units.

March 2026

THD applied for and won a $5,000 grant from San Francisco Beautiful for the Jack Early Park restoration.

The Nominating Committee will complete the proposed slate of nominees for the THD Board of Directors that will be presented to the THD General Membership for approval on April 2 at the THD General Membership Meeting.

The Social Committee is planning upcoming events including a Literary Walking Tour with Scott Lettieri, a novelist and reporter, who will share the rich literary history of the neighborhood. The tour will start at Caffe Trieste; the fee is $50 per person. Other upcoming events will include a Game Night, a THD Giants Game, a THD Keys Jazz Night, and a THD San Francisco Symphony night.

California Senate Bill 79, the Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act, was passed by the California legislature in 2025 to take effect on July 1, 2026. To implement the legislation, the Planning Department has proposed an adoption of an "Alternative Plan" that would increase the density allowed on certain parcels, including several in North Beach, which are not yet identified. The Planning Commission adoption hearing will be held on March 19.

The proposed project on 430 Green Street will demolish the existing structure and replace it with a new two-unit, four-story residential building with a garage on the ground floor and two family units above. THD has requested that the Planning Commission require the addition of a third residential unit on the ground floor instead of a proposed garage or require one-story height reduction.

The State Density Bonus Law proposed project at 875 Sansome Street would demolish the existing commercial building to construct a new, eight-story, 85-foot-tall residential building including 20 residential units and a below-grade garage.

President Nick Ferris concluded his final THD Board Meeting as President with thoughtful insights. He shared with the Board the importance of active committee meetings and setting clear goals, as ways to best engage THD members with THD.

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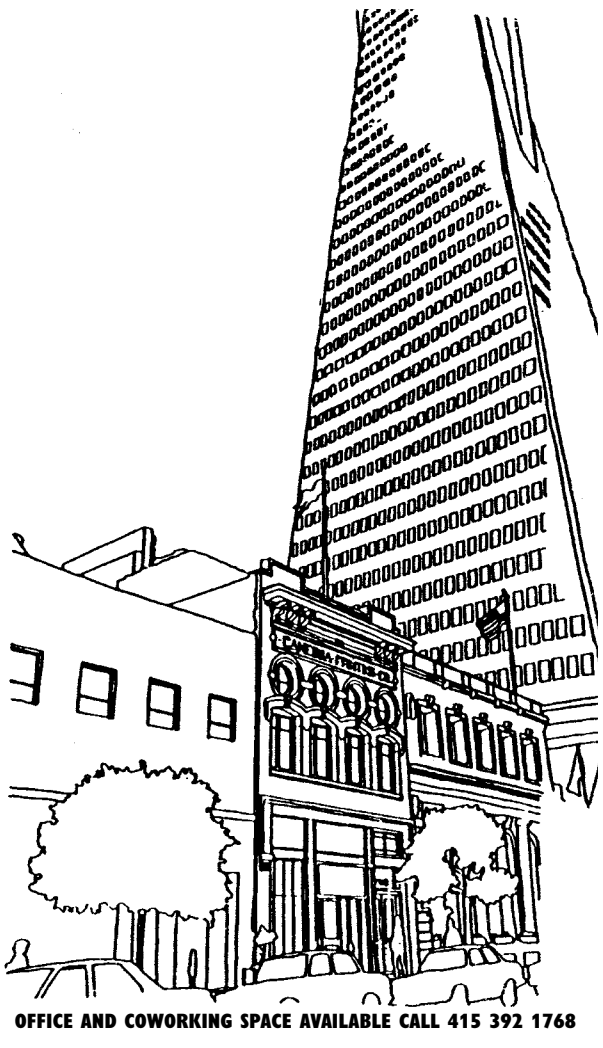

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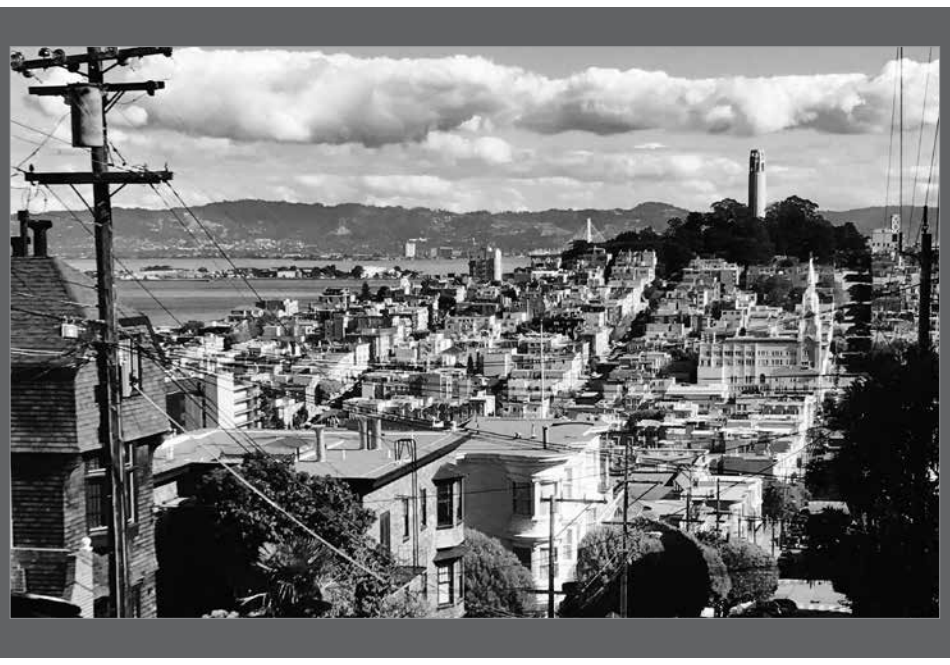

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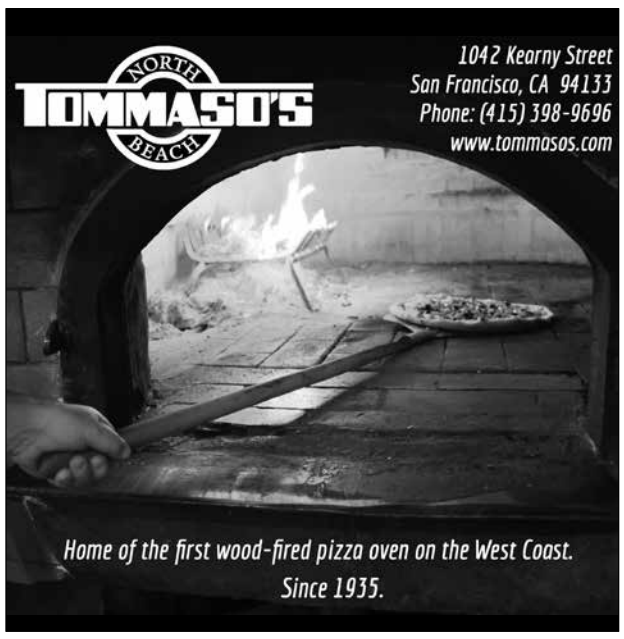

Breakfast & Lunch
7:30 to 2:30—this is 7 days a week.

PAT'S CAFE

Support Small Business

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AWESOME BREAKFASTS & LUNCHES

LETTERS TO MY DEAD NAME
(Life in transition)
Poems
by Richelle Lee Slota,
THD member
bluecedarpress.com

THD Committees Need You

Get involved in our neighborhood and make a difference! Join a THD committee and help keep the Hill a special place to live.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Budget: Kim Pendleton *treasurer@thd.org*

Membership: Andy Katz *THDmembership@gmail.com*

Oral History Project Manager: John Doxey *oralhistory@thd.org*

Parks & Trees: Michael Rothmann *michael.rothmann@thd.org*

Planning & Zoning: Stan Hayes and Nancy Shanahan *PZ@thd.org*

The Semaphore: Cap Caplan (Editor) *semaphore@thd.org*
David Lipkin (Photo Editor) *david.lipkin@thd.org*

Transportation: Howard Wong *howard.wong@thd.org*

Waterfront: Greg Chiampou *waterfront@thd.org*

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Communications: Al Fontes *al.fontes@thd.org*

LIAISONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Friends of Washington Square: Michael Rothmann

Northern Advisory Committee Member: Stan Hayes

TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Voice Mail: (415) 843-1011. Web Site: www.thd.org
P.O. Box 330159 • San Francisco, CA 94133

THD BOARD OFFICERS 2026-2027

President: Peter Stevens

Vice President: Greg Giachino

Recording Secretary: Sarah Goldsmith

Corresponding Secretary: Katie Hopkins

Treasurer: Kim Pendleton

Financial Secretary/Membership: Andy Katz/Judi Powell

Historian: Nancy Shanahan

Past President: Nick Ferris

The Semaphore Editor: Cap Caplan

DIRECTORS

Term: 2025-2027

Greta Alexander

Ian Kloville

Amber Ortiz

Fran Schreiberg

Term: 2026-2028

Rosa Arias

Stan Hayes

David Jones

Jack Shelley

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS!

There's no better way to be connected to your neighborhood and be a voice of the Hill than by joining Telegraph Hill Dwellers today.

Join at *thd.org*. If you'd prefer to have a brochure and sign-up form mailed to you, please send an email to *membership@thd.org*. Already a member? Give one as a gift!

Membership includes:

- A one-year subscription to news & events via email and a quarterly publication, *The Semaphore*.
- Opportunities to be active in your community. Your passion likely aligns to one of many committees.
- Social and Art & Culture events throughout the year—attend and contribute!

Annual Dues:
Individuals $35
Households $50
Seniors (65 and older) $25
Senior Households $40

Join now or give the gift of membership at *THD.org* or email *membership@thd.org*.

Telegraph Hill Dwellers
P. O. Box 330159
San Francisco, CA 94133

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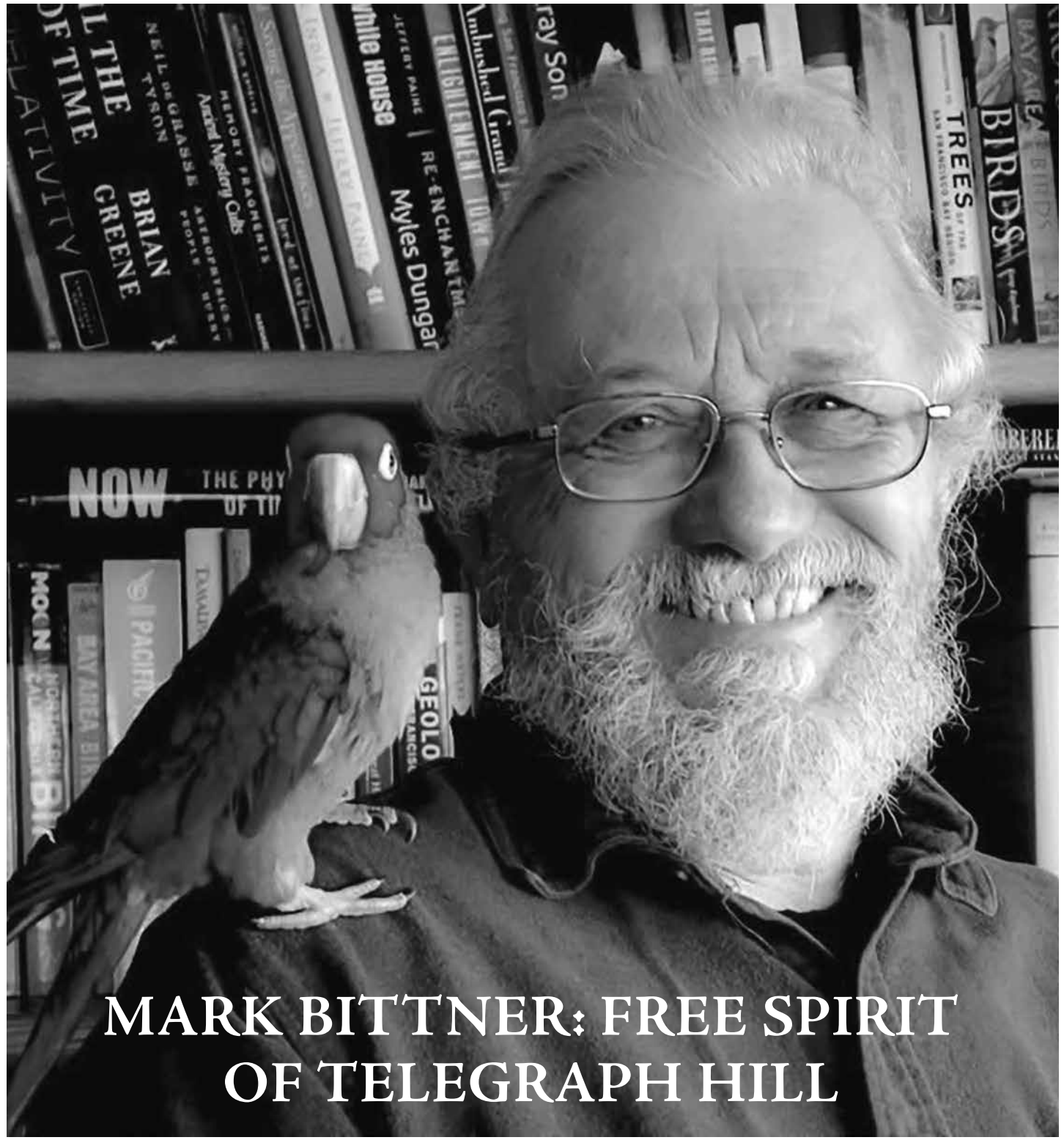
Issue 252 Summer 2026



MARK BITTNER: FREE SPIRIT OF TELEGRAPH HILL